



# Fast Facts

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

PS20

## WEST NILE VIRUS

### What is West Nile virus?

- West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne disease that is common in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East.

### When was West Nile virus first found in the United States?

- West Nile virus was first detected in the United States in New York in 1999. Since then, WNV has rapidly spread to 44 states reaching as far west as Washington State.

### Has West Nile virus been detected in California?

- In 2002, in California, one locally acquired human WNV case was detected in LA County. Seven imported cases were also identified.

### How many human cases of West Nile virus were found in 2002?

- Last year there were over 4,000 human cases of WNV detected, including 277 deaths in United States.

### How does someone get West Nile virus?

- People usually get West Nile virus from the bite of an infected mosquito. Also there is evidence that WNV can be acquired via a blood transfusion or organ transplant from an infected donor.

### What are the symptoms and treatment?

- Most people who are bitten by a mosquito with West Nile virus will not get sick. People who do become ill may experience mild flu-like symptoms like fever, headache and body ache. It is estimated that less than 1% of the peoples who are infected with WNV become severely ill and require hospitalization. The elderly are particularly susceptible to illness caused by WNV.
- Currently there is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Since it is a virus it does not respond to antibiotics. In severe cases hospitalization and supportive care is important.
- If you have symptoms of West Nile virus, call your doctor.

**How can people protect themselves?**

- Avoid activity outside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn and dusk.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing.
- Apply insect repellent according to label instructions.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- Eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.

**What is the State doing to control the spread of WNV?**

- California has a long history of conducting surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses and has taken active steps to ensure early detection of WNV. Due to ongoing collaboration between over 70 local mosquito and vector control agencies and state public agencies, California is well prepared to detect and monitor WNV. These agencies use a variety of scientific techniques and products to control mosquitoes in their earliest stages and play a key role in reducing the risk of WNV. Also California has launched a statewide public education effort about personal protection measures and reporting dead birds.

**Why is the public urged to report dead birds?**

- The public is encouraged to assist in the efforts to detect and monitor WNV by calling the WNV hotline if they find a crow, raven, magpie, jay or hawk that has been dead for about a day. Birds play an important role in maintaining and spreading this virus. Mosquitoes acquire the virus from infected birds, and then transmit the virus to people. Evidence of the virus in dead birds is often the first indication that WNV has been introduced into a new region. DHS has set up a toll free hotline for the public to report dead birds: 1.877.WNV-BIRD. Birds can also be reported by visiting the WNV Web site at <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>.
- For more information on West Nile virus, visit the Web site <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>.